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ABSTRACT

This digest provides facts and explanations about: (1) the peoples and places of the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia- Hercegovina; (2) the collapse of Yugoslavia and the crisis in Bosnia-Hercegovina or "Bosnia"; and (3) the causes, conditions, and consequences of the Bosnian war. The history of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1990 is discussed as well as allegiances of the various ethnic groups under the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires. The experiences of World War II are discussed from the Nazi satellite state run by local fascists in Croatia, to the Partisans of Tito in Yugoslavia. The collapse of communism and the political disintegration that began after Tito's death are described. Conditions and consequences of the Bosnian war include a terrible level of violence against civilians of all sides, refugees living in camps or who have fled to other countries, and a general destruction of cultural treasures. The brutality of the war is attributed to historic animosities and cultural divisions between contending groups especially those resulting from the viciousness of World War II and the history of struggle between Christians and Muslims in the Balkan with its literature and folklore on holy wars. Finally sources of information and materials for teachers are listed. These include a list of organizations that provide information and materials for teaching and learning about the peoples and countries of central and eastern Europe. Contains ERIC resources and a list of 8 references. (DK)

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by John K. Cox

Since 1991, a bitter and bloody war has raged in Bosnia-Hercegovina, part of the former country of Yugoslavia. The United Nations has tried to settle the conflict. And leaders of the U.S. government have considered sending armed forces to help victims of this war. This Digest provides facts and explanations about (1) the peoples and places of the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia-Hercegovina; (2) the collapse of Yugoslavia and the crisis in Bosnia-Hercegovina or "Bosnia"; and (3) the causes, conditions, and consequences of the Bosnian war. Finally, sources of information and materials for teachers are listed.

The Former Yugoslavia: Its Peoples and Places, 1918-1990. Yugoslavia was a country of about 23 million people located in southeastern Europe, across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. More than 15 ethnic groups lived in the former Yugoslavia. The majority of the population, however, belonged to one of six related Slavic groups: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. The Croats, Serbs, Muslims, and Montenegrins speak a common language, referred to as "Serbo-Croatian." But religious and other cultural differences, which have resulted from separate historical experiences, have divided these Slavic groups.

From the Middle Ages to 1918, most of these people lived in one of two empires, which dominated this part of Europe: the Habsburg Empire, ruled from Vienna, and the Ottoman Empire, ruled by the Turks from Istanbul. The Slovenes and Croats lived under Habsburg rule, while the Bosnians and most Serbs lived under Turkish authority. Serbia and Montenegro, though, had small independent kingdoms by the turn of this century. These served as a base for the construction of Yugoslavia (Land of the South Slavs) in 1918, following World War I, which was a monarchy headed by the Serbian ruling house.

During World War II, Yugoslavia was occupied by Germans and Italians. A Communist, Josip Broz (Tito), organized a large resistance force known as the Partisans. He wanted to throw out the enemy occupiers and transform Yugoslavia into a socialist state.

After World War II, Tito became the supreme ruler of the new, second Yugoslavia. The country was divided into six republics: Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro (Crna Gora), and Macedonia. Each republic corresponded to one of the six South Slav ethnic groups, but all had minorities.

The Collapse of Yugoslavia and the Crisis in Bosnia-Hercegovina. After Tito's death in 1980, centrifugal forces gained in strength. Inflation and unemployment rose sharply. The foreign debt climbed to over $20 billion. Ethnic unrest spread. Tales of corruption and mismanagement in firms all over the country racked the economy.

In 1989, revolutions toppled Communist governments throughout central and eastern Europe. The revolutionary spirit spread to Yugoslavia and helped lead, unfortunately, to devastating civil wars, the most tragic of which has been the conflict in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

In April, 1990, Slovenia, one of the republics inside Yugoslavia, held free elections. The Croats followed suit. The Communists were swept from power. In June, 1991, the two republics declared their complete independence.

The Yugoslav National Army (JNA), dominated by Serbs, responded aggressively to halt the disintegration of the country. After a fierce but short war, the JNA pulled out of Slovenia. But by the end of the year, rebel Serbs in Croatia had taken over one-third of the country. Serbs and Croats are still fighting in three areas of Croatia. The southern republic of Macedonia has also seceded. Ethnic tensions run high there too.

Bosnia-Hercegovina seceded from Yugoslavia in 1992. As the country's largest ethnic group, Bosnian Muslims occupied the leading positions in the republic's new government. At this time, the population of Bosnia was about 43 percent Bosnian Muslim, 33 percent Serb, and 17 percent Croat. The capital, Sarajevo, was famous as a cosmopolitan, tolerant, ethnically mixed city.

Most Serbs and Croats of Bosnia vowed that they would not live under a government dominated by Muslims. In the spring of 1992, Serbs rebelled, with support from the republic of Serbia, and a nasty civil war began, which has continued to this day. Bosnian Croats soon entered the war, sometimes joining Bosnian Muslims to resist the Serbs, but more often fighting Muslims to seize territory, for occupation only by Croats.

Causes, Conditions, and Consequences of the Bosnian War. Who started the war? Opinions vary. There is no doubt that all sides are now perpetrating heinous acts of violence. All of the ethnic groups are suffering, at home and on the front. In the midst of Europe's biggest crisis since World War II, one cannot put a value on the suffering of abused individuals of any nationality. One can, however, assert that the Muslims, because of huge campaigns of rape and "ethnic cleansing" aimed at them, have suffered the most in quantitative terms.

To date more than 200,000 people, mostly in Bosnia, have been killed in the civil wars. There are over two million refugees, many living in camps or with relatives in Croatia. Large numbers of displaced persons have also fled to Slovenia, Hungary, Austria, and Germany. Over 80 percent of Bosnia-Hercegovina has been occupied by Serb and Croat forces, with most of this territory under control of Serbians.

The war has been conducted viciously by all sides. We hear a great deal about front-line casualties. There are also gruesome scenes on television of funerals and hospitals being bombarded, marketplaces raked with machine-gun fire, children shot in buses as they are evacuated from long-besieged cities, and concentration camps holding abused, starving internees. The vast majority of the casualties in these civil wars have been civilians. Repositories of vast cultural importance, such as libraries, mosques, and monasteries have been deliberately targeted for destruction by the warring groups, especially the Serbs.

The extreme brutality of this war can be attributed in large part to historic animosities and cultural divisions between contending groups. For example, during World War II, Croatia became a Nazi satellite run by local fascists known as Ustashe. They set up a notorious concentration camp at Jasenovac and began ridding their country of minorities. Serbs, Muslims, Jews, and

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Gypsies all suffered. Thus the long-standing rivalry between Serbs and Croats, which in earlier centuries had had interludes of substantive literary and political cooperation, was poisoned by viciousness on all sides in World War II. These memories live on today.

Unfortunately, the history of struggle between Christians and Muslims in the Balkans is longer and bloodier. Each has viewed the other as the "infidel" since the Muslim Turks arrived in Europe as conquerors in the fourteenth century. But the war is less religious than cultural (and of course political and economic); identification with Islamic and Christian culture (Catholic in the Croatian case, Orthodox in the Serbian) is more important than differences of belief. Further, the literature and folklore of the region abound in sagas of holy war, armed uprising against evil foreign governments, and noble bloodshed. The tradition of the blood feud existed in many areas into the twentieth century. All the rival groups have long memories of both real and imagined injustices done to them throughout history, and each group seems to want revenge for past wrongs inflicted on them by one or more of the other groups.

The numbers of deliberate civilian casualties and prevalence of "ethnic cleansing" evoke memories of the genocide of World War II. People worry that the world has too soon forgotten the need for preventing another Holocaust.

The war is especially important for Europe because it has created large numbers of refugees who are an economic drain on their host countries. They also contribute to political instability by inciting the wrath of right-wing groups intent on finding scapegoats for Europe's economic malaise. Europe's diplomatic impotence in the face of this huge war on its own turf also serves as a warning that the future of the faction-ridden European Community is in doubt.

Sources of Instructional Materials and Information for Teachers. The organizations listed below provide information and materials for teaching and learning about the peoples and countries of central and eastern Europe, including the peoples and places of the former Yugoslavia. These recently and currently funded Title VI National Resource Centers, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, provide assistance, which may include lending audio-visual materials, providing outreach speakers for elementary, secondary and college classrooms or community groups, workshops for teachers and/or students, and textbook review. Services provided vary among centers; several produce newsletters.

Center for Slavic and East European Studies
University of California at Berkeley
361 Stephens Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-3230

Center for Russian and East European Studies
University of California at Los Angeles, with the RAND Institute
334 Kinsey Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024
UCLA (213) 825-4998

Institute on East Central Europe
Columbia University
1228 International Affairs Building
New York, NY 10027
(212) 854-4008

Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies
Duke University
Box 90259
Durham, NC 27708-0259
(919) 660-3142

Center for Soviet, Post-Soviet, and East European Studies
Emory University
113 Social Sciences Building
Atlanta, GA 30322
(404) 727-6582

Russian and East European Language and Area Center
Harvard University
1737 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-4037

Russian and East European Center
University of Illinois
104 International Studies Building
910 S. Fifth St.
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 333-1244

Russian and East European Institute
Indiana University
Ballantine Hall 565
Bloomington, IN 47405
(812) 855-7309

Russian and East European Studies
University of Kansas
108 Lippincott Hall
Lawrence, KS 66045
(913) 864-4236

Center for Russian and East European Studies
University of Michigan
210 Lane Hall
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
(313) 764-0351

Center for Russian and East European Studies
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT 05753
(802) 388-3711

Center for Russian and East European Studies
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
(919) 962-0901

Center for Slavic and East European Studies
Ohio State University
344 Oxley Hall
1712 Neil Ave.
Columbus, OH 43210-1219
(614) 292-8770

Russian and East European Studies Center
University of Oregon
c/o The Department of Political Science
Eugene, OR 97403
(503) 686-4877

Russian and East European Studies Center
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19174
(215) 898-8704

Center for Russian and East European Studies
University of Pittsburgh
4E-23 Forbes Quad.
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
(412) 624-3973

Russian and East European Center
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305
(415) 497-9468

Center for Post-Soviet and East European Studies
University of Texas
Geography 106
Austin, TX 78712
(512) 471-7782

Center for Russian and East European Studies
University of Virginia
103 Levering Hall
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(804) 924-3033

Russian and East European Language and Area Center
University of Washington
Thompson Hall 504, DR-05
Seattle, WA 98195
(206) 543-4852

Russian and East European Studies Program
University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 262-9632

Council on Russian and East European Studies
Yale University
Box 13 A Yale Station
New Haven, CT 06520
(203) 432-3423

References and ERIC Resources

The following list includes references used to prepare this Digest and related documents. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from University Microfilms International.

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